

Biden win puts climate pressure on Liberals; Advocates expect Ottawa to crank up action given likely new U.S. priorities

The Toronto Star

November 10, 2020 Tuesday

Copyright 2020 Toronto Star Newspapers Limited

Section: NEWS; Pg. A9

Length: 677 words

Byline: Alex Ballingall Toronto Star

Dateline: OTTAWA

Body

Next to Donald Trump, the Trudeau Liberals look like climate crusaders. But with Joe Biden on his way to the White House, environmental advocates expect new pressure on Ottawa to crank up Canada's climate action as the government prepares its anticipated plan to hit net-zero emissions by 2050.

Biden, the Democratic president-elect in the United States, is promising to spend more than \$2 trillion on "climate and environmental justice" initiatives. He plans to bring the U.S. back into the Paris Agreement, the key global accord to keep global warming below catastrophic levels this century. And he has vowed - like Canada and the European Union - to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with legislation to enforce progress along the way to ensure that it happens.

It's a stark contrast to the Trump presidency, when the U.S. pulled out of the Paris accord and weakened environmental regulations like fuel-efficiency standards and rules for methane emissions while Canada plunged ahead with its first national plan to fight climate change.

The dynamic is set to shift, just as Canada is preparing its own plan to meet the Liberal governments promises from 2019 to exceed its current emissions target for 2030 and hit net-zero by 2050.

"Canada is in the throes of designing our own approach to net-zero pathways, and I think we are all waiting to see what that approach is going to look like," said Josha MacNab, national director of policy and strategy at the Pembina Institute, a clean energy think tank.

"Canada's been a bit slower to act on this than we were hoping, and if the States steps into this space that may create more pressure or incentives for Canada to be making good on its commitments in the same direction," she said.

The government promised in its throne speech on Sept. 23 to "immediately" release its next climate plan, but Environment Minister Jonathan Wilkinson's office has since said it will roll out coming policies this fall.

Wilkinson was not available for an interview Monday, but told the Star in an emailed statement that the government will "soon bring forward" this updated plan.

He also said Canada welcomes "the new administration's commitments to climate action" and that the government will "continue to lead on the world stage to push for ambitious climate measures."

Biden win puts climate pressure on Liberals; Advocates expect Ottawa to crank up action given likely new U.S. priorities

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, meanwhile, spoke with Biden by phone on Monday, and a readout of their conversation from Trudeau's office said they discussed a range of issues, including "co-operating on the fight against climate change."

Speaking earlier to reporters, Trudeau also said it is a "welcome sign" that the incoming president is making this a priority.

Merran Smith, executive director of Clean Energy Canada, said the prospect of the U.S. rejoining the global effort on climate change is indeed a positive step. It could provide Canada's clean tech sector with the opportunity to sell wares to a reinvigorated American market, and also open the door for zero-emission electricity exports to the U.S., she said.

But if the coming Biden administration is able to fulfil its climate promises, Canada risks falling behind other countries in the growing clean tech and renewable energy markets, Smith added.

"We have been moving forward on climate action slowly, but we are behind the rest of the world's leading nations," she said. "Canada is going to need to move quickly, take action, put policy and money... in moving forward low-carbon infrastructure and the low-carbon economy in Canada."

Others see the potential for specific pressure points for Canadian policy-makers under a Biden administration, including over Biden's opposition to the Keystone XL oil pipeline from Alberta to the U.S.

MacNab also pointed to Biden's expressed support for "carbon border adjustments," which are tariffs placed on goods that come from countries deemed to have weaker climate policies. Depending where the U.S. would draw that line, such a policy could force Canada to ramp up policies like the national minimum carbon price on industrial polluters, she said.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: COLUMN

Publication-Type: NEWSPAPER

Subject: CLIMATE ACTION (91%); CLIMATE CHANGE REGULATION & POLICY (90%); EMISSIONS (90%); CLIMATE CHANGE (89%); ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES (89%); ENVIRONMENTAL LAW (89%); CARBON NEUTRAL ENERGY (78%); ENERGY EFFICIENCY & CONSERVATION (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL DEPARTMENTS (78%); ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION & POLICY (78%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (78%); INTERVIEWS (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); LIBERALISM (78%); NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS (78%); AGREEMENTS (77%); GREENHOUSE GASES (77%); HEADS OF STATE & GOVERNMENT (77%); TREATIES & AGREEMENTS (75%); ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (73%); GOVERNMENT ADVISORS & MINISTERS (73%); GLOBAL WARMING (72%); PRIME MINISTERS (72%); EXECUTIVES (71%); EUROPEAN UNION (69%); RESEARCH INSTITUTES (63%)

Organization: EUROPEAN UNION (56%)

Industry: EMISSIONS (90%); ENERGY & UTILITIES (89%); ALTERNATIVE & RENEWABLE ENERGY (78%);

Biden win puts climate pressure on Liberals; Advocates expect Ottawa to crank up action given likely new U.S. priorities

CARBON NEUTRAL ENERGY (78%); ENERGY EFFICIENCY & CONSERVATION (78%); METHANE (78%); NATURAL GAS (74%); GLOBAL WARMING (72%)

Person: DONALD TRUMP (90%); JOE BIDEN (79%); JUSTIN TRUDEAU (79%)

Geographic: OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (89%); CANADA (96%); UNITED STATES (94%); EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES (56%)

Load-Date: November 10, 2020

End of Document